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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Happy Holidays to All! ~ People Are Talking! ~ SainT Upgraded!

~ Tech IPOs To Rebound! ~ Space Harrier Update! ~ Fastest Geek Alive!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, I hope that you all had an enjoyable holiday! Hanukkah Harry and ol' St. Nick managed to find their way to our house, despite all of the rain and fog! All that remains of the morning mayhem are a few stray pieces of ribbon and wrapping paper. The gifts have been put away, the holiday visits are over, and we're preparing for a short night - there's a day of work on Friday.

All in all, it was a nice day. We had a quiet morning opening up our gifts, and having breakfast. The dogs went "crazy" when we pulled out the huge bones that were left for them, as well as a few other gifts that they'll devour soon enough. Now if we can keep them from fighting with each other over everything! A quiet visit and meal with my in-laws, and back home to relax. The only thing that would have made the holiday better was an extra-long holiday weekend. Oh well.

It's hard to believe, but this is our last issue for 2003! This will be our 5th year of publication. I really didn't think that we would be around this long, but the interest continues. The news pertaining to "all things Atari" remains slim, but the few items that grace our doorstep each week helps to perpetuate the hobby. And the technology news continues to remain interesting! So, here we are, getting ready to embark on our next new year. Thanks for taking the ride with us! And remember, New Year's Eve is rapidly approaching. Please, welcome in the new year responsibly - don't drink and drive!

Until next time...

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SainT Version 1.60 Released

Version 1.60 of the Windows Atari ST emulator SainT has been released. There are lots of great changes in this version, including the ability to record movies complete with audio. There are also fixes to improve compatibility with demos, and SainT is now the first emulator to run the 3D full-screen interrupt demo by Ziggy Stardust. You can download the

latest version of SainT and read the documentation at:

http://leonard.oxg.free.fr/SainT/saint.html

Atari800 Version 1.3.2 Released

Version 1.3.2 of the Atari 8-bit/5200 emulator Atari800 has been released. Atari800 supports many computing platforms, including DOS, Windows, Windows CE, Amiga, Falcon, and more, as well as forming the basis for several other Atari 8-bit emulators. Improvements since the last release include:

R: can now be hooked to a real serial port
Various ANTIC and POKEY fixes
Disk and cartridge info saved in the state files
Casette handling greatly improved
Even more cartridges supported (40 now!)
Some rare buffer overflows fix

You can download the latest version of Atari800 as well as the source code at the Atari800 Emulation Page.

http://atari800.sourceforge.net/

Space Harrier XL/XE Project Update

Chris Hutt has posted a recent update to his Atari XL/XE Space Harrier Conversion Project page. This ambitious project aims to port the popular Sega arcade game Space Harrier (http://www.klov.com/S/Space_Harrier.html) to the Atari XL/XE computers. Chris'

Recent work involves moving the game to work in a cartridge, as opposed to the original goal of making it available in disk format. Due to this change, Chris has had the opportunity to improve several aspects of the game, including more colors, faster draw routines, larger backgrounds, and more speech samples. Please visit Chris' Space Harrier Conversion Project page for complete details.

http://www.sheddyshack.co.uk

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Christmas has come and gone, and I sit here holding my stomach and wondering why it is that I always eat too much at holiday meals.

At one time I had a good excuse for over-indulging. I used to have to visit three or four different households on Christmas day. Since my heritage is both Italian and Polish, and since both tend to place a lot of emphasis on food and holiday meals, I would end up having at least three dinners on Christmas day. I found that I could manage to make everyone happy if I had a small amount of food at each place.

These days, I have only two places that I have to be on Christmas day, and one of them doesn't put a huge emphasis on the meal. But, nonetheless, I ate way too much.

I think that a lot of my 'problem' has to do with the fact that it's a learned behavior now... It ain't Christmas without overeating and feeling uncomfortably full.

Don't tell my sister-in-law this, but I just can't warm up to the idea of having lasagna for Christmas dinner. My traditional favorite is turkey, but I've also had goose and ham for Christmas dinners in years past. Lasagna just doesn't seem to fit in with the holiday feeling. Don't get me wrong, I like lasagna. But it's just not "Christmas food".

My family also makes a big deal of Christmas Eve dinner. THIS meal is where I shine. <grin>

It's a meatless meal consisting of several different types of fish, shrimp, and...

Pierogies!

Yeah, you've probably guessed that this is the Polish side of the family. <grin>

There are several Polish concoctions that I don't care for, but pierogies aren't among them. Of course, I only had ONE meal that night, so I went home feeling happy and contented. The following day was, as I've mentioned, a different story.

Perhaps it's a sign of advancing age, but I tend to center more on the holiday meals these days than the gifts.

On another note, this issue finishes out our 5th year of publishing A-ONE. Dana will probably mention this as well, but we want to thank you for your support over the past five years. It sounds corny, but we really couldn't do it without you. Knowing that there's someone out there who reads this makes the effort worthwhile. Thank you.

Well, I could talk all day about ethnic food, multi-session dinners, and digital publishing but I think it's time we get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet, don't you?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'Meffy' asks about the maximum hard drive space you can use on a Falcon:

"Is there a limit? I have a nice IDE 2.1Gb drive from a laptop that I'd like to fit... any special s/w I need?"

Adam Klobukowski tells Meffy:

"The limit is the IDE standard limit, around 156GB if I remember correctly."

Carey Christenson adds:

"In theory there should be NO upper limit of the Hard Drive's storage capacity. You could have a 250 GB Hard drive and be running Magic with Jinnee or Mint and HDDriver and have 2 125GB partitions. BUT I believe Magic and MINT both have a 138 GB IDE limit. Remember this is under MAGIC or MINT running HDDriver. You will not be able to go past 1 GB using TOS and an older hard disk driver. But to answer your question a 2.1 GB should work fine under normal TOS conditions."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, adds:

"Why should they have such a limit? It is the hard disk driver that limits the capacity of the drives you can connect to an Atari. The operating system just limits the partition size, but not the drive's capacity.

But you won't be able to profit from it (large drive capacity) without a hard disk driver supporting IDE drives of that size. HDDRIVER is known to work with drives up to 128 GByte. It should also work with larger drives, but so far this has not been tested as far as I know."

Brian Roland adds:

"2.1 gig will be no problem whatsoever....
If you want access to all your partitions under the plain jane default desktop, just keep your partitions a gig or smaller.

An advantage to smaller partitions is that you can use smaller sector sizes, which means less wasted space (a sector is the least amount of disk space any write operation can use...so even if you have a file with 2 bytes in it...it'll still take a full sector).

The advantage to larger partitions...is that you don't run out of Drive letters as quickly

At any rate...2.1 gig IDE on a Falcon....shouldn't be a problem at all."

'D.C.' asks about upgrading the RAM in a STacy:

"I'm interested in upgrading a 1 MEG Stacy to 4 MEGS. How easy is it to do this? Can the Stacy accept STE (or equivalent) SIMMS? I've seen a hardware hack that allows PS/2 memory to be soldered onto a Stacy. Is there an easier way to do this?"

Brian Roland tells D.C.:

"Have you ever been inside this STacy?
Mine has a memory board that takes 4 1X8 SIMMS.

This was most likely an aftermarket board (I got the STacy used), but hey, ya just might be lucky and have this board in your Machine.

If you do open the STacy...get someone to help you and be very careful... It's pretty straight forward, but an extra pair of hands will save you a lot of grief.

If you do have to work it by yourself...it can be done...just use some sand bags, pin cushions, beanbags, or something along those lines to afford you some wedging/holding support.

Once you get the screws out and 'carefully' pry the top and bottom apart (not too far!), you'll barely have room to get a hand in and disconnect the keyboard (this will be a tight maneuver)...the tricky part from here on is that there is a short set of wires that plugs onto the mother board and leads to the screen (top half of the STacy). These plugs are located on, and underneath a daughter card just forward of the MIDI and Monitor ports...carefully pull this card upwards and set it aside inside the machine (don't try to pull it 'out' of the chassis...there is a wire soldered to it). Next, unplug the screen wires and the top will finally come off so you can easily get at everything else.

Once you get the shielding off...you'll see a large second level PCB nearly the full width of the STacy towards the front (under where the keyboard was). Lift that out of its sockets, flip it over, and see what ya got.

Unless you, or someone you know is really good, and super patient with a soldering iron, I suggest you exhaust all your sources trying to find a prefab 4meg STacy board. If you can find a board...it's really easy to unplug the old one, and plug in the new one.

Best (USA), ATY(USA), Wizztronics(USA), and Atari Workship(UK) come to mind as likely to have some memory boards in stock. Web searches on those names should provide contact information. No doubt there are more places in Europe (Namely Germany and France) to check as well...I'm just not familiar with them being an English speaker.

If you can't find a prefab memory board....
The Chips'n'chips and DoIt archives offer instructions on how to hack in various types of memory (SIMMS, DIPS, SIPPS, etc....). A lot of these hacks are described in German or French only.

It might even be possible to strap in some of the regular ST memory upgrades...these usually connect somehow with the MMU chip (using a pingrid, clamping, or socket adaptor) and like to ride on a riser in the Video Shifter area (pull out the video shifter chip, plug on the board, put the shifter chip in the memory board). I don't know if there is space enough for these type RAM expansions...but I'd think hacking one of these in would be MUCH easier than trying to trace out a million and seven resister points and running wires into some kind of home-made SIMM adaptor. That would be the advantage to a kit like that...the resistors and such already be in place. With Schematics to the STacy's memory board pin-out...you might could even find a way to build a relatively simple adaptor to just plug the thing right on where your current memory board is. I dunno...just food for thought."

Kenneth Medin adds:

"Hm, I have dismantled mine the "other way round". By starting with the two screws under the _inside_ sticker that says "   Stacy" (sorry you need a genuine Atari charset to see the Atari logo...) you can separate the screen part and then very carefully take it apart by lengthening the cables to the screen. They are quite delicate and easy to damage. People with little patience should definitely stay away from dismantling a Stacy...

As I wrote in another post today I did put a Marpets Extra Ram Deluxe memory expansion in mine. Some soldering will be needed and a cut in the plastic to allow the SIMMS to sit in the battery compartment. Not too hard to do by a careful person. To get under the motherboard for soldering most of the computer has to be taken apart if I remember correctly."

'Tim' asks about getting a memory board for his TT running:

"I just got this MagnumTT Ram card from Germany. It accepts 16, 32, 64, and 128MB PS/2 type SIMMs. I cannot get it to work and my lack of german is also complicating things! The manual is in German and it talks about jumper settings etc. I have been able to figure out the settings (I think) for the SIMMs but not sure what I am doing wrong. I tried 3 different SIMMs: two type of 16MB EDO's and some 32MB EDO's. None work. Any ideas or help would be most excellent!"

Michael Schwingen tells Tim:

"You need 5V SIMMs, either FPM or EDO. The modules must have a symmetrical RAS/RAS mapping - the manual lists numbers of RAM chips that o d/ do not work (see http://heisenberg.ccac.rwth-aachen.de/~michaels/files/magnum/), "richtig" means "correct type".

3.3V DRAMs may well not work - often, these have a "V" in the middle of the type number, or start with "HYB31", but to be sure, you have to look up the exact datasheet.

When using different sized modules, the bigger module must be in bank 0.

On old TT models with the CPU on a daughterboard, you may have to enable an additional wait state. In that case, change the jumper from 0WS to 1WS.

If the presence detection pins on the modules are wired correctly, you need no jumpers on any of the PD jumper positions - these are just a fallback in case of badly designed modules, which shows as a module being detected with the wrong size."

Tim asks Michael:

"Do you know if I need 2k or 4k refresh SIMMs? AFAIK all 72-in pSIMMs are 5V. I have never seen a 3.3V one. I tried FPM, EDO, different sizes and not will work. These SIMMs work in my Amiga 060 card just fine. I am beginning to think that maybe my TT card is dead, or it is just really really picky about SIMMs!!!"

John Blighe tells Tim:

"I bought a card with SIMMS included but it isn't recognized by my TT either. I bought another card (larger ram) and THAT isn't recognized either even though all jumpers are definitely set the right way. No one seems to have any answers!"

Jean-Luc Ceccoli adds:

"It has to deal with the ram itself : not all are compatible with expansion boards. For instance, I bought a 32MB with 8 x 3 chips simms (4 MB each simm). I had 4 another 3 chips modules, but these caused random crashes. So, before thinking of trashing either your expansion board or your TT, be sure you can get the right type of memory. If I remember correctly, those of 4 MB in older Macs are (not quite sure however)."

Jim DeClercq adds his experiences:

"My experience has been satisfactory, but imperfect. I got a few Magnum TT boards. Posted a want list in alt.computer.memory, and two sellers responded. One had 128 MB SIMM, so I ordered some of those. Plugged two of them in, put it into a TT, and only 65 MB was recognized, by either the desktop or sysinfo.prg. For me, that is still more memory than I will ever use. If I want to take it apart again, I could try swapping slots, or swapping memory, or getting the JDEC standards and hacking the size bits, or at least reading what they say. Am not planning to do that.

The worst that happens is that I paid 30 USD more than expected for that much memory.

The SIMM have 16 rather large chips of one type, and 8 of another. The paper sticker on the SIMM says KMM53623000CK-6. On the board itself is SAMSUNG, 53632000AK2(#) and AD0823-01. What is the part number?

Also have some 64 meg SIMM, with 36 chips on it, and some 32, with 18 chips on it. They are untested. Should these work? Either number of chips is also divisible by three!"

Djordje Vukovic posts this about TeraDesk3:

"Version 3.0 of TeraDesk, the only open-source desktop currently existing for the Atari computers, is now available !!!

Almost exactly a year ago, TeraDesk was made open source, Henk Robbers took over its maintenance and TeraDesk V2 appeared.

In December 2002, after an exchange of ideas about possible upgrades of TeraDesk, Henk kindly invited me to participate in its further development. The first result of that cooperation TeraDesk V2.3 in March 2003.
Since then, we have been working on TeraDesk 3.

Our goal has been to maintain TeraDesk as a small, simple, fast and reliable desktop, which would be functional in the modern multitasking environments, and yet to keep, as much as reasonable, familiarity with the original TOS desktop, and keep it undemanding enough to be run on any Atari computer, even the one with the smallest amount of RAM and oldest version of TOS (currently TeraDesk is a little less than 129KB in size and uses

about 200KB of memory). In my opinion, the cooperation has been a fruitful one, with an unspoken division of labor which suited both of us. Henk concentrated on memory and file management, new configuration file concept and also on multitasking-related issues, while I added some new functions, made some optimizations, and worked on improving the graphical appearance of the program.

Lately, Henk decided to move on to other matters, and asked me to finish what was required to publish TeraDesk 3. I have tried to do that to the best of my abilities, but Henk's assistance is sorely missed

Anyway, though there are still a few unsolved problems (i.e. bugs) in TeraDesk 3, it appears to be sufficiently good to be published and used. It is available at:

http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/atari

and divided into three archives: the binaries, the complete source, and the V2-to-V3 configuration-file conversion utility.

Many changes and optimizations were made, new features added or existing ones improved, a number of bugs removed- and hopefully not many new ones introduced

A short (well, not so short) list of changes and new features:

H. Robbers:

- Configuration data now in text mode, in a new file teradesk.inf;
  Easy to keep compatibility. A set of routines for reading/writing configuration items and implementation of a concept which will make it very easy to add new configuration items.
- Replacement or heavy modification of many routines to adjust to the new configuration file requirements.
- Colour palette is saved in a separate (text) file teradesk.pal.
- Program cfg2inf.prg for converting the binary cfg to the textmode inf.
  Source code adjusted so that it can be compiled for reading either the old binary configuration (cfg2in.pfrg) or the new text file (desktop.prg)
- Replaced use of Malloc (Gemdos) to standard malloc.
  This reduces memory fragmentation on the Gemdos level considerably, especially important in multitasking environments.
- Replaced Wout's memory allocator by mine (AHCM).
  AHCM allows memory leak detection and reduces fragmentation even more by always allocating Gemdos blocks in whole multiples of chunk size.
- As a result of the above it wasn't possible anymore to shrink the start amount of 2000 directory entry structures (68 Kb).
  So I implemented a pointer array instead. It starts with 256 entries (1 Kb) and is mildly exponentially expanded when needed.
- cfg2inf.prg: The editor string in the old config is converted to a flag for the (installed) editor in the new config. So it is preserved if the editor was installed.

Dj. Vukvioc:

- Fixed a bug of not immediately refreshing a changed background pattern/colour in text windows;
- Fixed a bug of not correctly setting and so corrupting type of desktop icon in desktop icons dialog;
- Fixed some bugs which disabled printing of more than one file at a time;

- Fixed some bugs in scrolling text fields (cursor placement, padding...)
- Fixed a bug which swallowed the first char of command lines for .TTPs
- Corrected enabling/disabling of some menu items depending on context;
- Fixed bad redraw of animated colour icons;
- Fixed several bugs related to memory (de)allocation and buffer overruns
- Removed some overlooked fixed keyboard shortcuts from previous version;
- Made some fixes which (hopefully) will correct improper window and dialog redrawing with XaAES only (V0.963).
- A lot of source code cleaned up and size optimization;
- Some optimization of desktop.rsc and the use of it;
- Massive reorganization of dialogs which handle what are essentially filetype or filename lists (ie. .file masks, program types, document types, icons...)

  so that there is only one filetype-list dialog in desktop.rsc; significant reduction in executable code size because a lot of routines are made to work on all file/filetype lists. Same concept is used for entering/editing all lists: filetype masks, program types, window icon filetypes and applications.
- Reorganization of "Install Application" function (see above); a dialog is shown displaying a list of installed applications. Further reduction in code size.
- ALL dialogs now fit ST-low resolution. Some are reduced in size even more for faster redraws on low-end machines
- Several small fixes and improvements in floppy formatting routines; floppy drives are locked during formatting/copying in Mint & MagiC;
- Somewhat improved handling of overscan hack (tested with Lacescan);
- Improved operation of the "fuller" gadget: a) fulled window is moved left until it is completely on the screen; b) in "hex" mode the window is made only as wide as needed;
- Much improved graphical appearance of dialogs (proper background, colours and 3D effects in modern AESses, etc.) Significant reorganization and simplification of routines.
- Added window iconify/deiconify capability in AESses which support it (AES4.1, Geneva, Magic, XaAES...)
- Added checking for duplicate entries in filemasks, program types, window icons and applications lists;
- Added possibility to start an application or program type in "no-multitasking"

  mode in Magic (not working very well yet);
- Added possibility to limit memory available to a program type or application in multitasking environments.
- Added capability to call a file selector in scrolled input text fields in dialogs upon pressing the [Insert] key
- Added capability to mark an installed application as "autostart";
- Added capability of "Search" to find text in files as well;
- Added "touch" ((re)set time/date and/or file attributes) functionality; user interface implemented through additional button in the "Object info" dialog. Considerable reorganisation of that dialog(s). TeraDesk is now able

  to display DOS/Windows folder attributes (and respect them to a degree) though not able to change them.
- While copying files it is possible to change date/time and attributes.
- Added "Compare files" functionality; a nice knack is that it tries to resynchronize search positions after a found difference.
- Improved "Open..." function; it now tries to figure out what type of item should be opened: a program, a folder/drive, a file assigned as a document to application, or an unassigned file. In case of a program/application, it is possible to enter a command tail after path+name;
- Command line dialog for .TTP programs remembers last command if the same program is activated again.

- Filename/filetype entry forms in dialogs appear in 8+3 length if there is no long-filename-capable OS present (i.e. without Mint or Magic);
- [Shift][Help] calls ST-Guide(if available) to display TERADESK.HYP;
- Nicer display of long window titles;
- Improved recognition of TOS and AES versions and their capabilities and limitations;
- Updated the .HYP documentation (not quite satisfactory yet)

Some possible areas of further work - though I am not sure how probable; a lot of time needed ... some help might be useful

- removal of bugs;
- multiple column display of directory windows in text mode;
- improved manipulation of file attributes for non-tos filesystems
- integration a windowed, long-filename-capable fileselector reusing a number of TeraDesk's existing functions and capabilities to minimize code size;
- documentation update.

Sorry, a couple of links were wrong. Hopefully all is right now

http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/atari.htm "

Well folks, that's it for this week, this issue, and this year. Please have a happy, healthy and safe New Year celebration and have the foresight to drink responsibly. If you're going to be driving, don't drink. If you're going to be drinking, don't drive. Remember: The life you save may be MINE!

'Till next year, keep your ears open so you'll be sure to hear what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Star Wars' Is Year's Best!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Voodoo Vince' Is Clever!
Madden Still A Force!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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GameSpy Tabs 'Star Wars' Title as Game of Year

Hobbits may rule the multiplex this year, but when it comes to the small screen, fans of video game fantasy want all Jedi, all the time.

GameSpy.com, one of the Internet's leading video game sites, on Tuesday handed its Game of the Year honor to "Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic."

The role-playing game, developed by BioWare and published by LucasArts for the Xbox and PC, beat out titles like "WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgamer" for the Game Boy Advance and "Beyond Good & Evil" for the top award.

Video game publishers typically use such awards for bragging rights, sometimes republishing their titles in "Game of the Year" editions.

In that way, the $10 billion domestic U.S. video game industry has taken its cue from Hollywood, where the awards season is a crucial marketing window for films.

"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" chalked up more than $125 million in ticket sales in the United States and Canada in its first five days of release, and its release so close to the end of the year has helped garner the tale of Hobbits and elves serious Academy Awards buzz.

Other top game publications are expected to soon give out their 2003 kudos, including GameSpot.com, which will name its top game of the year on Christmas day; and 1UP.com, the Web site of Ziff Davis's game magazines, which will name its winners at a ceremony in Las Vegas in early January.

Previously, football game "Madden NFL 2004" from Electronic Arts Inc. won "Game of the Year" honors at the Video Game Awards held by cable channel Spike TV.

Voodoo Vince, a Clever Time

In early brainstorming for "Voodoo Vince," creator Clayton Kauzlaric made a hasty sketch of what would become the main character, then scribbled a note nearby: "A game where getting hurt good."

That sums up this $39.99 title, which may be the first game to feature the weird obverse of schadenfreude: You play a voodoo doll who takes pleasure in his own pain.

Developed by newcomer Beep Industries for the Xbox, "Voodoo Vince" is a fairly standard entrant in the so-called "platformer" genre. We get lots of jumping from one platform to the next, killing monsters, and defeating bosses at the end of each level. There is some puzzle solving that, while not particularly difficult, can be clever.

The hook here is a dry, snarky humor, and the numerous ways in which Vince's best offense is a good offense against himself. In an early level, he gains victory by lighting himself on fire and scurrying off to ignite an pair of no-good gasoline pumps. One of several special attacks has Vince climb into a guillotine to be sliced in half along with his enemies.

This novel conceit accompanies a jaunty soundtrack and a caricature of New Orleans that makes Vince's task of rescuing his fortune-telling master,

Madam Charmaine, an oddly soothing venture.

Still, it’s not quite enough to make "Voodoo Vince," published by Microsoft, worth more than a rental. The graphics can be tinny and the plot is straight out of Mad Libs: Unlikely hero takes upon his (insert adjective) shoulders the burden of saving (insert quasi-parental figure) from the clutches of the maniacal (insert villain) motivated by (insert wacky insecurity).

"Voodoo Vince" won’t quite fit into any one category, which isn’t such a good thing. Its attempts to be cuddly with a macabre spirit derivative of - but not as effective as - Microsoft’s masterful "Oddworld: Munch’s Odyssee." There’s not much gore, but images of scissors jabbing Vince in the eye feel more unsettling than funny.

Beep Industries appears aware of this discord when it notes unconvincingly on its Web site: "This is more wholesome than it sounds. Honest."

Cynics might see "Voodoo Vince" as part of Microsoft’s bid to cultivate a stable of iconic Xbox characters like Nintendo did with Zelda and Mario. Could be. What I saw was a title best described as "a game where getting hurt unexceptional."

Bam! Whap! ’Madden NFL’ is a Force

Like a durable running back, Madden NFL Football 2004 keeps plugging. This year, EA Sports has sold more than 4 million copies, making it the top-selling game for PS2.

At any time, as many as 7,000 Madden maniacs may be facing off. Says EA Sports’ Erik Whiteford: "There are a lot of people who need to feel that they are not just beating the computer. Now you can go online and see how good you really are."

Sony has sold about 1.5 million PS2 network adapters ($39.99). Microsoft has sold about 500,000 subscriptions to its $49.95-a-year Xbox Live. Next year, market research firm DFC Intelligence expects, the number of online gamers will triple to 4.1 million.

Sony has its 989 Sports lobby, a chat room where online gamers can meet, while Microsoft connects players on its XSN Sports network. Next week, the XSN Sports Championship begins. At stake: $25,000.

Future vision: Says Whiteford: "You’re going to see a lot more interactivity away from the game environment."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari Explorer Updates

Atari Explorer (http://www.atari-explorer.com) has just posted some very interesting updates to their site, including new images of the Jaguar Duo, images of the "second" version of the Falcon Microbox (whose design hints at the Playstation 2), and new information showing the cost of Jaguar software and Atari's commitment to the platform late into 1995. You can find all this and a wealth of other great information at atari-explorer.com.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Antispam Law's Effectiveness Doubted

An antispam bill that was poised to become law in the new year may do little to stem the barrage of junk e-mail, according to corporate information and technology officers who deal with the problem daily.

The legislation, called the CAN-SPAM (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing) Act, was signed into law by President George W. Bush earlier in December.

It requires senders of unsolicited commercial e-mail to let recipients opt out of future mailings, sets penalties for sending deceptive messages, and begins the process of creating a national Do Not Spam list. The measure requires all e-mail advertising - not just unsolicited messages - to include a valid reply-to address, a valid postal address, and accurate headers and subject lines.

But CIOs say it won't work, since so much spam comes from outside the United States.

Tod Ferran, CIO of Riverton Motor, an auto dealership based in Sandy, Utah, says you'd need "the authority of a world government" to enforce such a law. Instead, he favors a technological solution. The open-source Mozilla e-mail system he uses includes a junk e-mail filtering feature, he notes. He also recommends "education of the public" to not respond to spam solicitations.

Matt Kesner, chief technology officer of the Fenwick & West law firm based in Mountain View, California, says he thinks legislating against spam is worth a try. Still, he questions why Congress would pass a bill that would trump a strong new California antispam law.

That measure, passed in September but overruled by the federal law, would have required marketers to get permission from or have an existing business relationship with a recipient before sending e-mail. Without better technological and legal solutions, Kesner says he's afraid "we'll get to

the point where we accept e-mail only from people we know."

Group Lambastes UUNet on Spam

When Virginia's attorney general announced the arrest of a man they alleged was a top e-mail spammer two weeks ago, an executive of UUNet - one of the country's largest Internet network providers - stood proudly nearby.

The Northern Virginia-based company, a division of WorldCom Inc., had helped prosecutors build their case against the man listed by a leading anti-spam tracking group as the eighth-biggest spammer in the world.

But that same group, Spamhaus.org, also monitors the world's Internet service providers, the companies that connect people and businesses to the Internet. In that category, Spamhaus lists UUNet as the ISP allowing the most spammers onto its network, based on the Internet addresses they are using.

Britain-based Spamhaus lists 128 spammers with accounts on UUNet-controlled networks, although some of the listings were for the same organization operating under multiple names.

Of the 128, 16 are among the most prolific spammers, according to Spamhaus. Only bulk mailers who have been kicked off at least three other ISPs for spamming are on the Spamhaus list.

In the war against spam, ISPs play a crucial role. They are the gateways to the online world, and bulk e-mailers need them to send spam. As spam has grown to account for roughly 60 percent of all e-mail, many ISPs have spent heavily to beef up their spam-fighting efforts, often competing with one another over whose features are most effective.

Many ISPs engage in daily combat with spammers, shutting down their connections only to see the spammers pop up again with new accounts under different names.

Spamhaus lists more than 275 U.S.-based ISPs with spammers operating on their networks, many of them for as long as a year. The list includes some of the best-known ISPs, including those operated by telephone and cable companies.

Craig Silliman, a UUNet network facilities director, said the Spamhaus ranking is unfair.

UUNet, along with a few other firms such as AT&T bellsouth.net, a unit of BellSouth Corp.; and comcast.net, part of Comcast Corp.

Netscape Readies Cheap ISP Service

America Online is entering the low-priced ISP market with a service under the Netscape name that will be priced at about $10 monthly.

Customers can get the Netscape unlimited Internet access service for just $1 per month until March 1, according to a registration page on the Web

site of AOL, a division of New York-based Time Warner. After that, the price will go up to $10 monthly.

The service includes nationwide access, personalized e-mail addresses for customers, and a search service powered by Google, according to the site.

AOL today offers unlimited dial-up access for $20 monthly or $199 per year under the CompuServe brand. It also sells a $23.90-per-month unlimited dial-up service that comes with AOL 9.0 Optimized, a collection of enhancements such as e-mail, instant messaging, and exclusive content. Those enhancements are also available for $15, along with 5 hours of dial-up access, for customers who buy their own broadband connections. A package with a broadband connection, called the AOL for Broadband-Cable/DSL Plan, costs $55, according to AOL's Web site.

The introduction of the Netscape service indicates that AOL recognizes the two basic kinds of Internet users: those who want high speed and those looking for the lowest price, says Marcel Nienhuis, an analyst at The Radicati Group, a consulting company in Palo Alto, California.

"I think AOL is being slightly outmatched on their prices by MSN," Nienhuis says. Microsoft's unlimited MSN 8 Dial-Up Internet Service costs $10 per month for the first six months and $22 per month after that, according to the company's Web site. Microsoft also offers several alternate pricing plans, including a lower rate for members who access MSN via another ISP.

Also available is a selection of free ISPs that are supported by advertising, but many users don't want to look at the ads, he added. And recently, a handful of inexpensive dial-up ISP services have drawn interest.

Meanwhile, both Microsoft and AOL, as well as other ISPs, are trying to boost revenues by coaxing members to sign up 111770 for new services such as additional storage.

Consumers, especially first-time Internet users, are looking for an easy-to-use portal to the Internet with personalized content, an area in which Netscape is well known, Nienhuis adds.

AOL, on the other hand, has become better known for its communications tools, such as AOL Instant Messenger, he notes. The company probably didn't want to blur the AOL brand by adding another service, and with good reason: AOL leads in ISP market share in North America, according to the Radicati Group's research.

Netscape was the name of the first widely commercialized Web browser, released in 1994. Netscape Communications, which distributed it, was sold to AOL in 1998.

Domain Names Once Again Fetch Top Dollar

One more sign the technology sector is rebounding: An Internet domain name is again commanding seven figures.

Last week, a Florida man sold men.com for $1.3 million, a healthy profit over the $15,000 he paid for it in 1997.

The buyers, largely entertainment industry folks who have opted to remain anonymous behind the acquiring company, men.com LLC, want to create a portal for men.

"In the last couple of years, the domain names were selling for significantly less than what they did in ’99, 2000," said Monte Cahn, chief executive of Moniker Online Services, which brokered the sale.

He said the seven-figure price tag for men.com "is a big indicator of what’s yet to come."

At the market’s height, a handful of domain names sold for millions of dollars, including $7.5 million for business.com in late 1999 and $3 million for loans.com in January 2000.

But countless others sat unclaimed, and the dot-com bust forced many domain name speculators to give them up when they came up for re-registration, at roughly $30 apiece.

Ryan Levy, vice president of marketing for men.com, said the company also has purchased more than 1,000 other domain names over the past year at fire-sale prices to use in conjunction with the new portal.

The seller, Rick Schwartz, believes he could have gotten much more for men.com by waiting longer.

But Schwartz, who owns more than 4,000 other domain names, said he wanted the money now - so that he can buy others before prices really skyrocket.

Fastest Geek, Again

Over the past couple of months, PC Magazine took its Fastest Geek competition on the road. As always, contestants raced against one another and the stopwatch to see who can build a PC the fastest from a table full of parts. We held regional events in New York, Boston, and San Jose, and we invited our regional winners to the Comdex show in Las Vegas for the final showdown and the right to be called America’s Fastest Geek.

Each contestant built a 1.8-GHz AMD Athlon-based PC, provided to us by ABS Computers and equipped with an Asus A7V600 motherboard, a 250GB Maxtor SATA hard drive, and an ATI Radeon video card. The winner of each regional event won an ABS system with a 2.2-GHz Athlon 64 FX-51, two 250GB Maxtor SATA hard drives, 512MB of RAM, and an ATI Radeon 9800 graphics card. Similarly configured systems have clocked some of the fastest times we’ve ever recorded on our benchmark and gaming tests.

Each heat drew a big crowd. PC Magazine Labs director Nick Stam, associate editor Jeremy A. Kaplan, staff editor Daniel S. Evans, and I emceed, and we enjoyed the repartee with PC Magazine readers. Audience members cheered on their favorites and even helped us spot problems in the contestants’ assemblies, such as an upside-down floppy disk drive cable, which caused the drive light to stay on.

We held heats throughout the first two days of Comdex, and the fastest person from each day competed against our regional champions in the grand finale on Wednesday. Twenty-one-year-old Jeremy Bergen, an information technology manager from Boulder, Colorado, was victorious, just seconds

ahead of his closest competitor. We added time penalties for missing or misplaced screws, improper connections, mislocated drives, and the like, but Bergen's work was perfect-in a mere 5 minutes 11 seconds.

A few of our contestants were, shall we say, a bit less handy than others or less knowledgeable about how PCs are put together. When they clearly had little hope of finishing their heat, we allowed audience members to come up and assist them. This didn't improve their chances, but it was great fun. We kidded some of the slower contestants about timing them with a sundial or a calendar, but they took our joking in stride. (We used dnSoft Research Group's XNote Stopwatch for our big-screen timer. It's shareware; check it out.)

As happened at our summer Fastest Geek competition, held at CeBIT New York, some of the contestants managed to destroy equipment when the Red Mist descended on them and turned caring, sensitive people into hypercompetitors. I guarantee that twisting a mouse or keyboard connector while inserting it will bend pins and will not earn you a fast time. Likewise, cross-threading a screw and twisting so hard that you break off the head is a very bad idea. One regional contestant did just that-on one of those lovely Maxtor 250GB hard drives! I had to take it home and drill it out on the milling machine.

We also lost a couple of motherboards in Las Vegas, probably to static electricity caused by the dry air. The other components held up pretty well, except for the SATA cables. The ones in the machines were definitely not up to the rigors of continual insertion and removal, especially by contestants who were unfamiliar with them. We replaced several cables in the course of the event, and a SATA header on one of the motherboards bit the dust, too. I gave the remains to the heavy-handed contestant as a keepsake.

I don't think SATA connectors are inferior to parallel ATA connectors, by the way. In the vast majority of systems, the cable will be plugged in just once, and gently at that. And the speed increase over parallel ATA is most welcome.

Later in the week, the tables were turned. I was a contestant in AMD's Build Your Own PC Race for Charity, an annual event in which journalists compete to build machines, which are then donated to the schools of their choice. The builders with the top three finishing times also win cash prizes for their schools. Sadly, I finished fourth (but I did have the fastest time a few years ago). PC vendor Systemax provided the machines, NEC donated the monitors, and a number of other peripheral vendors contributed as well.

Building a PC from parts may not be a life-saving skill, but it sure can be fun-and even profitable if you're the Fastest Geek!

Tech IPOs Will Be Back with a Vengeance in 2004

Investors, brace yourselves - 2004 is gearing up to be the year of the technology IPO.

After a lengthy drought, investment banks are making bold predictions that as many as a dozen European companies will go public in 2004, ranging from software and Internet to mobile phone firms.

The successful initial public offering (IPO) of Scotland's Wolfson Microelectronics, trading some 33 percent above its October issue price, has helped make bankers confident there is pent-up demand for new technology stocks.

And, a recent frenzy for Chinese dot-coms and speculation mounting about the IPO ambitions of Web icon, Google, and U.S. circuit mobile operator, Cingular, has only upped the ante.

"I think the industry can do a dozen European technology IPOs next year," one London-based technology sector banker said. "Investor appetite is certainly there. If 2003 was the year of the convertible, 2004 will be the year of straight-equity such as IPOs and follow-on offerings," said a European technology sector adviser at a major London investment bank.

Since early 2000, when the technology bubble began to deflate, few IPOs have been done in Europe. Companies have quietly grown and are now ready to float in an upbeat market.

They include a large number of Internet companies, testimony to the fact that not all the promises made in the Internet bubble were pie-in-the-sky.

Price comparison sites such as Kelkoo, and online financial advisers Moneysupermarket.com are being mentioned as potential first-half flotation candidates.

"We will be observing the various flotations planned in the tech market, and, as the market strengthens this year, this is a question we will be asking ourselves," said Dorothea Arndt, marketing director for UK arm of Kelkoo.com.

In no way do these companies resemble the cash-hungry vehicles of the late 1990s which acquired customers at huge losses in a landgrab that was paid for with cheap capital provided by eager investors and venture capitalists. Unlike ISP World Online or online travel group Lastminute.com, some of the new Internet companies are profitable at flotation.

Price comparison Web Sites hold no inventory and see strong earning potential. Gross margins, the percentage of profit after deducting the raw operating costs, can be as high as 80 percent. Such firms can be valued at hundreds of millions of euros.

That is the kind of profile investors like.

"Every IPO will have to prove that it offers more than the stocks that are already out there. It's not like the year 2000 when we were almost forced to buy, because the shares would soar on the first day," said Philippe Kiewiet de Jonge, coordinator of the technology, media and telecoms analysts team at ABN Amro Asset Management which oversees 30 billion euros of investments.

French telecoms and Internet service providers Iliad and LDCom have both said they are looking to float next year. Iliad, part owned by Goldman Sachs and advised by SG, may be valued at one billion euros.

More speculative are two are other large IPOs that may happen in the second half of 2004. Birmingham-based mobile phone maker Sendo, which shelved its flotation in 2001 when the market tanked, is again looking at an opportunity to raise money for expansion plans and to realize the value for

managers and staff.

No mandate has been given and the firm has yet to make its aggressive 2004 plan to at least treble sales to $750 million and produce over five million handsets. Although profit margins are small in this consumer electronics-related business, the firm could be valued at many hundreds of millions of euros.

Symbian, the mobile phone software maker - owned by Britain’s Psion, Finland’s Nokia, Sweden’s Ericsson and other phone makers - may also float. However, as its software is often combined with that of Nokia’s Series 60 applications, Nokia may also want to own Symbian outright.

Encouraged by the Wolfson offering, other semiconductor companies are also expected to come to the market. Software is an area where bankers also expect action. They tip firms that provide multi-media messaging services, and security firms that specialize in defense of computer worms, viruses and spam.

"I have one IPO nearly on the shelf and a follow-on offering ready to go, one in software and the other in semiconductor equipment," a second London-based banker said.

A second technology specialist banker says he has two IPOs waiting to go and expects to do a total of five during 2004.

The banks that will battle for the mandates include CSFB, UBS, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Lazard and Merrill Lynch. For some, there is more at stake than just revenues after the numerous IPO implosions of the 1990s and 2000: their reputation.

Guide to Online Photo Album Sites

The holidays are ending. Now you’ve got all those digital photos of kids opening presents, teenagers on skis, and Aunt Edna passed out from too much eggnog. You need a way to share those pictures with your friends and family.

Here’s where photo album Web sites come in. In hopes that you and your loved ones will buy prints, these sites let you post your photos free of charge for anyone to view.

It’s amazing how many of these sites are out there. To name just a few, you’ll find Sony’s ImageStation, Kodak’s Ofoto, Slug’s PBase, PictureTrail, Shutterfly, Snapfish, and Yahoo Photos.

Here’s an introduction to what to expect when you pick an album site, what to look for, and what to look out for. Luckily, it’s not a major commitment; you can always try a different site with your next album. Many others are available.

Not all album sites are free. PBase and PictureTrail give you limited, temporary free accounts, but then expect you to pay for something longer-lasting or more powerful. The price isn’t high - less than $25 a year for either - but it’s more than you’d pay at a free site.

It’s a bit surprising that free album sites have survived when so many

other free Internet services have not. It seems amazing that companies can still give away server space and bandwidth in hopes of selling a few prints. It’s possible they won’t last, which is why you should be cautious about depending on one as a form of archival storage for your photos (CD-Rs are a better choice). But they’re around now and you may as well use them for sharing and for prints.

Speaking of prints, and of freebies, these sites often offer free prints as a bonus when you first sign up - which is a pretty good argument for using more than one site. Shutterfly’s current bonus appears the best, offering 15 free prints to new members. Well, they’re almost free: You pay for shipping. But that can change, so look around before picking a site.

Once you’ve picked a site, you’ll have to sign up. Most require your name, e-mail address, and a password. If you have a Yahoo account, you already have a Yahoo Photos account.

Then you can create an album and start uploading your pictures. With ImageStation, though, you upload the pictures first, then create an album. The easiest way to upload pictures is to drag and drop them from Windows Explorer to a box on a Web page, an option that all of these sites offer - after you’ve allowed the site to install a small browser add-in.

The sites all let you to rearrange the order of the pictures, as well as add titles and captions. Rearranging is an easy, drag-and-drop job. Titles and captions certainly make your pictures more understandable, but not all of us have the patience to add them.

You want to share your pictures with family and friends, and the Web sites want you to share them: The more people who look at them, the better the chance of selling prints.

But the sites typically make sharing pictures "easy" in a way that actually makes it difficult. They want you to enter e-mail addresses into a Web form so they can send announcements to your loved ones. This means you have to type or paste in addresses that you already have in your regular e-mail address book; if you could use your own e-mail program, you could just click them.

What’s more, not everyone you know may want these sites to have their e-mail address. Finally, these notices tend to be highly formatted e-mail messages, complete with photos, buttons, and a subject like "Enjoy my photos" - not the sort of thing that always gets through spam filters.

You’re better off just copying the URL from the album page and pasting it into an e-mail message you write yourself. But that doesn’t always work. Some sites, such as Shutterfly, use one URL to display an album to its creator and another for everyone else.

A more certain work-around is to use the site’s Web form to send one invitation - to yourself. Once you get that, you can copy the URL the site provides in the e-mail message, and pass it along to your friends and family.

Of this assortment of sites, Yahoo Photo is the only one that offers a more reasonable way to invite friends. The site provides an option that gives you an easy-to-type URL.

If you don’t want your friends and family to have to sign up just to look at your online album, consider that when you choose your photo site. This

restriction is key to ImageStation and Snapfish.

Of course, the sites hope you and your loved ones will order plenty of prints - which is more expensive than using your own ink-jet printer. However, if you consider the costs of ink and good photo paper, the difference isn't substantial. Besides, the print quality is generally excellent and you don't have to mess with scissors.

In addition to prints, these sites sell all sorts of photo-oriented gifts to make your kids' grandparents happy. These include coffee mugs, calendars, T-shirts, and greeting cards.

But Sony's ImageStation offers what must be the strangest photo gift of all: chocolates, cookies, and candies with your photos glazed on. The Web site does not list the ingredients.

Spears Reigns Again on Internet

Just as Internet users were beginning to lose interest in longtime Web wonder Britney Spears, a few sexually provocative magazine covers and a famous smooch with Madonna propelled the pop princess back into favor.

Yes, it's that time again - when Lycos, America Online and Yahoo! each weigh in with their end-of-year statistics and, as was the case last year and the year before, Spears managed to claw her way near the top of the lists of the most searched-for celebrities.

Until Spears started promoting her new album with a flurry of attention-getting stunts, highlighted by her Sapphic excursion at the MTV Video Music Awards in September, the singer actually fell off Lycos' top-10 list of search terms for several weeks, spokesman Aaron Schatz said. Ultimately, though, she finished in the No. 2 spot overall at Lycos for the year, right behind song-swapping service Kazaa.

At Yahoo! she finished sixth on the overall list of searched-for terms, with one celebrity ahead of her: Eminem.

Yahoo! also reports that the search term receiving the biggest percentage gain year-over-year is, no surprise, Paris Hilton, she of online sex-tape fame. Yahoo! says searches for her went up a mere 212,000%.

Over at AOL, the biggest topic online was the war in Iraq, judging from activity at the Internet service provider's many message boards.

Following the war was politics in general and, in particular, the Democratic party primaries, the California recall election and "The Reagans" miniseries. Celebrities and their scandals also were hot, with Rush Limbaugh, Kobe Bryant and Michael Jackson leading the way.

Reality TV also was popular on AOL message boards, led by "American Idol" and followed by "Survivor," "Paradise Hotel" and "Big Brother."

Apparently, threesomes are quite popular on the Internet, according to Yahoo! The company's list of the most-searched movies is led by the Harry Potter soon-to-be trilogy, and more. It's followed by "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Matrix" trilogies, with "Spider-Man" and "8 Mile" rounding out the top-five searched-for movies.

And Lycos is predicting, based on its growing number of searches, that the movies "The Passion of the Christ," "Troy" and "Catwoman" will be hits.

Speaking of feature films, "Finding Nemo" has the dubious honor of being probably the year's most downloaded movie at peer-to-peer file-sharing services, according to the firm BayTSP. And surprisingly, BayTSP reported, the Miramax film "Shaolin Soccer," which hasn't even been released in the United States, was hugely popular.

Garnering an immense amount of short-lived attention was Al-Jazeera, the Arabic cable news network, which generated three times as many search queries in April than did the word "sex." Driving the interest in Al-Jazeera in March and April was the fact that its Web site featured video of American prisoners of war, Schatz said.

The top TV shows searched for, according to Lycos, were "American Idol," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "The Simpsons" and "Survivor." The top sports stars were Bryant, Anna Kournikova, Michael Jordan, David Beckham and Allen Iverson.

Nielsen//NetRatings is reporting that the top online brand, judging from statistics culled from the first 10 months of the year, will probably be AOL, narrowly outscoring MSN and Yahoo!

Sober Worm Threatens Holiday

A self-e-mailing worm is threatening to impose a Sober holiday on individuals and companies alike.

The worm created havoc in October by getting into systems and e-mailing itself to every e-mail address it could find. Then a second variant, Sober.B, popped up at the end of last week, attempting to intrigue people with subject lines referencing George W. Bush.

The B variant was given a low-risk status as it is relatively easy to stop and remove, and it seemed to have been stopped in its tracks. However, the weekend saw the German writers release the same worm but with different subject lines.

Just prior to Christmas, it seems that people don't want to open a file about George Bush's militancy. But "Sorry, that's your mail", "Hi, it's me", "Thankyou very very much", "you are an idiot" and "I hate you" seem to have captured the post-party alcohol-addled workers across the globe who are stuck at work when they'd rather be at home eating mince pies.

As such, the attachments are getting opened, the worm is spreading. Most antivirus vendors have given Sober.C a Medium risk simply because of its acceleration. However, those major antivirus vendors also have updated virus definitions that detect and block the pest.

There is a risk that within the next day, the virus could go haywire - especially if staff eyeing the calendar are not updating their antivirus files. Rather fortunately, little work is being done at the moment and companies will benefit from employees not being at work over the holiday break so it is not going to disrupt anyone all that much.

Except of course the IT staff who may yet receive the dreaded phone call on Christmas or Boxing Day inviting them to spend the whole day cleaning up the network rather than watching movies and drinking too much wine. Bah humbug.

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